



Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public Middle School Students 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey May 2008



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has sponsored the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) since 1991 as an anonymous and voluntary survey among random samples of high school students at the national, state, and local levels. A middle school YRBS has become more widespread in recent years. The CDC developed the surveys to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. Rhode Island has administered the high school YRBS since 1995. In 2007, the state conducted its first middle school YRBS among 2,382 students for a response rate of 81%. The weighted, self-reported data presented here are representative of 6th to 8th grade public middle school students statewide and can be used to make important inferences about health-risk behaviors. The RI Departments of Health; Education; Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals; and the Office of Health and Human Services provided funding for the YRBS.

Donald Perry, MPA prepared this report. For further information, contact Mr. Perry, RI Department of Health (401) 222-7628 or Anne Marie Silvia, RI Department of Education (401) 222-8951 or visit <http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/statistics/yrbs.php>.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The data show an early age of initiation for many health risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol use and riding in a vehicle, weapon carrying, physical fighting, lifetime tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, overweight, fasting, insufficient physical activity, and sedentary behavior). Some risky behavior may become more established by the time students leave middle school, as rates are much higher among 8th graders than 6th graders for certain risk factors (e.g., lifetime tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sedentary behavior).

Personal Safety and Violence

Helmet and seatbelt use are the most effective ways to reduce fatalities and injuries from bicycle and car accidents, respectively. Six of ten RI public middle school students never or rarely wore a bicycle helmet in 2007. Nearly two-thirds never or rarely wore a helmet when rollerblading or skateboarding, with rates increasing steadily from 6th graders (51%) to 8th graders (78%). Only 8% of students never or rarely wore a seatbelt. However, nearly one quarter ever rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol, with rates increasing greatly by grade to 31% for 8th graders. Most violent deaths at schools involve firearms, and fighting can lead to serious health outcomes. One in five students had ever carried a weapon and almost half had ever been in a physical fight.

Tobacco Use

Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Cigarette and cigar smoking increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, respiratory illness, and cancer. Sixteen percent of RI middle school students had ever smoked cigarettes with rates increasing rapidly across grades from 8% for 6th graders to 23% for 8th graders. Students were less likely to have used smokeless tobacco (3%) and somewhat less likely to have smoked cigarettes (4%) than to have smoked cigars (5%) in the past month (i.e., currently). Few students currently smoked cigarettes (2%) or used smokeless tobacco (3%) on school property. Nearly one third had never been, or were unsure if they had ever been, taught in school about the dangers of tobacco use in the current academic year.

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The use of alcohol and other drugs by adolescents is associated with problems in school, accidental injury, violence, delinquency, and suicide. Among RI middle school students, 15% had at least one alcoholic drink in the past month (i.e., currently) and 28% had ever drunk alcohol. About the same proportion, one in ten, had ever used marijuana, painkillers, or inhalants. There were substantial increases from 6th to 8th grade in the lifetime use of alcohol (13% to 41%), marijuana (4% to 16%), and painkillers (7% to 15%).

Body Weight and Weight Control

Overweight during adolescence is associated with negative psychological and social consequences and adverse health outcomes. Nearly a quarter of RI middle school students described themselves as slightly or very overweight while almost twice as many were trying to lose weight. Thirteen percent had ever engaged in fasting (i.e., not eating) for 24 hours or more, with rates increasing steadily from 9% for 6th graders to 15% for 8th graders. Experts consider fasting to be an unhealthy method to control weight.

Physical Activity

Physical activity builds and maintains healthy bones and muscles, controls weight, and reduces depression and anxiety. Eight percent of RI middle school students reported not being currently enrolled in physical education, and nearly half had insufficient physical activity overall. The same proportion, one in three, watched 3+ hours of TV a day or did not play on a sports team. Nearly a quarter played video games or used a computer for non-schoolwork at least 3+ hours a day, with the lowest rate among 6th graders (17%).

Asthma and Disability

About 13% of U.S. children under age 18 have ever been diagnosed with asthma resulting in hundreds of thousands of doctor's office and hospital outpatient visits, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and lost school days each year. Among RI middle school students, 13% reported currently having asthma, and over a third lived with a cigarette smoker, which could promote or exacerbate asthma. Eight percent of students reported having a physical disability or long-term health problem. Eight percent also reported having a long-term emotional problem or learning disability, ranging from 5% for 6th graders to 9% for 8th graders.

**Figure 1 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public Middle School Students,
Grades 6 - 8, 2007 YRBS**

Percentage of students who:

■ At Risk □ Not At Risk

Personal Safety and Violence

Never or rarely wore a bicycle helmet
(among students who rode a bicycle)

60.3% 39.7%

Never or rarely wore a seatbelt
when riding in a car

7.9% 92.1%

Ever carried a weapon, such as a
gun, knife, or club

19.8% 80.2%

Have ever been in physical fight

48.8% 51.2%

Tobacco Use

Smoked cigarettes on one or more
of the past 30 days*

4.1% 95.9%

Used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip
on one or more of the past 30 days*

2.6% 97.4%

Smoked cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars
on one or more of the past 30 days*

5.4% 94.6%

Used any tobacco during the past 30 days
(i.e., cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco,
snuff or dip)*

7.0% 93.0%

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Drank alcohol during the past 30 days*

15.0% 85.0%

Ever used marijuana

10.0% 90.0%

Have ever taken painkillers, such as
OxyContin, Codeine, Percocet, or Ty-
lenol III, without a doctor's prescription

11.1% 88.9%

Ever sniffed glue, breathed the contents
of spray cans, or inhaled any paints or
sprays to get high

8.2% 91.8%

Body Weight and Weight Control

Described themselves as slightly or very
overweight

24.1% 75.9%

Were trying to lose weight

42.1% 57.9%

* Current use

Source: 2007 Rhode Island Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,382)

Figure 1 (Continued) - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public Middle School Students, Grades 6 - 8, 2007 YRBS

Percentage of students who:

■ At Risk □ Not At Risk

Physical Activity

Did not attend physical education classes at least one day in an average school week

8.0% 92.0%

Were not physically active for a total of 60 minutes per day on at least 5 of the past 7 days

44.9% 55.1%

Watched 3 or more hours of television on an average school day

34.6% 65.4%

Did not play on at least 1 sports team during the past 12 months

34.2% 65.8%

Asthma and Disability

Had been told by a doctor or nurse that they had asthma and still have asthma*

13.4% 86.6%

Now live with someone who smokes cigarettes

37.8% 62.2%

Have any physical disabilities or long-term health problems

7.8% 92.2%

* Current asthma

Figure 2 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public Middle School Students Occurring on School Property, Grades 6 - 8, 2007 YRBS

Percentage of students who:

■ At Risk □ Not At Risk

Tobacco Use

Smoked cigarettes on school property on one or more of the past 30 days*

2.0% 98.0%

Used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip on school property one or more of the past 30 days*

2.5% 97.5%

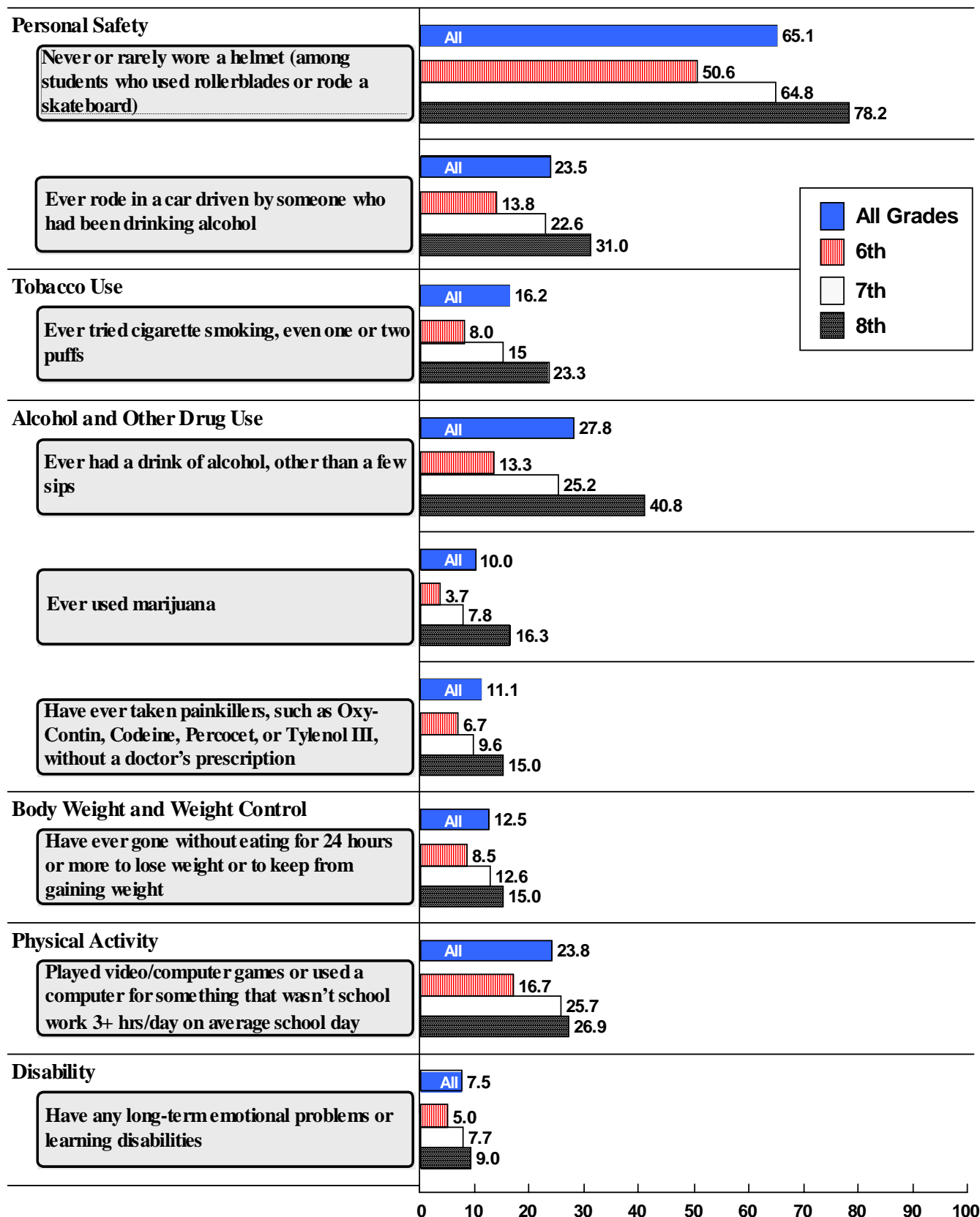
Were not taught or were not sure if they were taught in school about the dangers of tobacco use during the current year

31.5% 68.5%

* Current use

Figure 3 – Selected Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public Middle School Students, By Grade, 2007 YRBS

Percentage of students who:



Source: 2007 Rhode Island Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,382)